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A R G U M E N T

A P R I O R I K

Concerning the

Existence and Perfections

o f

G O D,

And its Importance to

Virtue and True Religion,

STATED and CONSIDER'D:

Together with

The DIFFICULTIES and OBJECTIONS, which
have any where occurr'd;

Particularly

In a Dissertation by a Learned Hand, at the end
of Mr. LAW's Treatise of SPACE, &c.

by Mr. Glover. a dissenting
Minister in Lincolnshire; author
& The Treatise entitled, an Enquiry
concerning Virtue & happiness. London 1751. 8vo.
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T H E
P R E F A C E.

HE N an author writes for the sake of truth, and in defence of that alone, he has nothing at heart but the discovery of that truth he is seeking after; and a sincere and faithful endeavour to set his arguments in that light which will best express his own sentiments, and most clearly convey to his readers the real force of evidence. He avoids, as much as possible, whatever may tend to take off their thoughts and inquiries from the matter in hand; and therefore aims at the greatest simplicity of language

that he can frame: even all figures and drefs of the imagination, that would amuse, and perhaps delight, if they do not fairly and justly illustrate the argument, he carefully lays aside: much less does he offer the least pretence of authority, or even the pleasures that may attend any persuasion, to weigh in the scale of truth: well knowing that these may injure and obscure, but can never possibly add to the evidence of it, or help the mind to perceive it: much less still does he allow himself to use any personal reflections or insinuations; which is abusing truth by the most immoral conduct, and raising up a zeal which soon blinds the understanding, and degenerates into the greatest partiality of judgment.

On the contrary, if a man is contending for received and establish'd opinions only, such as he may have an interest of reputation or profit in espousing; which tho' they may be true,

true, he does not consider as such, but only wishes to propagate for his own sake, or perhaps also for the imagined good of others ; he then has little or no concern about the real truth and evidence of his principles ; but taking them for granted, because he fancies them important, he tries all possible means of bringing men into the profession of them : consequently, as the love of truth is one uniform and simple disposition in the human mind, but the passions and affections of men are infinite ; he has many other methods of persuasion, besides the force of reason, to apply. It is therefore of great use to him to embellish and recommend his discourse by all the ornaments of eloquence, and the arts of learning : he may very successfully call upon the weakness and superstition of men to attend to what others have believed, more ancient and wiser than they ; and here is room enough to deceive the ignorant, by mistaken and false representations : for what should deter

deter a man who is defending, not the truth, but some profitable or important doctrine ? He may usefully excite their hopes and fears, if he can but persuade them that their salvation depends upon believing.

So different is the temper and character of those who contend for what is call'd orthodoxy, or received and established principles as such, and the lovers and promoters of mere truth and virtue.

This observation is not only founded in the reason and nature of things, but has often, and very lately, appeared to be remarkably true in fact and experience. The late excellent Dr. Samuel Clarke seem'd to possess every talent one could almost wish for, to promise success in a search after truth, or to recommend the practice of virtue. If an uncommon measure of learning and knowledge in every science ; if the most laborious and constant application

cation in the most judicious manner ; if the greatest and most disinterested impartiality ; if, above all, the most faithful and honest practice of virtue in his whole behaviour ; if any, or all of these, can be supposed to be of any avail, or to give any assistance in the discovery of truth ; Dr. Clarke will be allowed to have had the greatest part of these advantages, by all, even his most prejudiced opponents ; and I think there are very few who will deny him any of them. His excellencies and capacities were really so many and so great, that it is very hard to prefer any to the rest : but those which most struck the observation of his acquaintance, perhaps because so seldom found united with the others, were, a most constant and even attention to any subject he had in view, without interruption or confusion ; and an uncommon modesty and candour in expressing his own sentiments, tho' without the least diffidence or reserve. This temper always secured him from being drawn aside

aside from his argument by any impertinence, passion, or art of his adversaries, and enabled him to see thro' their false reasoning, and to pass by their injuries without any emotion. This would have given him great advantage, even in the cause of error; but the force of truth in such bands must be vastly increased, coming with its own weight, disentangled from confusion, and uncorrupted with passion.

With these talents and dispositions, Dr. Clarke has either professedly or occasionally wrote on the most important subjects, with great learning and judgment; ever keeping his point in view, faithfully setting it in the most just and regular light, sometimes at the greatest expence of care and pains; with the utmost simplicity of stile, plainness, and perspicuity; never urging authority but against authority, or to justify his opinions from novelty, the prejudice of the bigots of antiquity; and

and always avoiding, with the nicest caution, the least personal reflection, or any foreign digressions, that his opponents might intend to draw him into, from the subject in hand.

He contended indeed with adversaries of all sorts : some that shewed the same love of truth and virtue : these generally were convinced, or left their differences very intelligible. But others have raised an opposition against almost every principle he has advanced ; denying or contesting some of the plainest and most important truths that seemed to support his opinions.

*There was one principle in particular, which was with Dr. Clarke a favourite point, because he thought the foundation of all virtue and true religion very much depended upon it. This was the argument *a priori* concerning the nature and perfections of GOD.*

The following discourse is intended to state and consider this argument, and to answer such objections against it as seem to have any real weight; particularly those advanced in the Dissertation, mentioned in the Title-page: not to contend for victory; but to obviate mistakes.

The just character on this occasion given of Dr. Clarke, due to the memory of that great and good man, is not intended to bias any one in favour of this, or any other doctrine espoused by him. On the contrary, that unavoidable esteem which every lover of truth and virtue must needs have for so excellent a person, ought to excite the greater care and impartiality in examining the truth of what he maintained. For altho' the judgment of the judicious, and the principles of the wise and virtuous are most likely to be true; yet are we strictly obliged to
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see and examine for ourselves; and to admit nothing as true, or as a rule of our conduct, but what we evidently perceive to be such, and therefore only obligatory on our consciences. Besides, the excellency and value of our principles cannot arise from the number or wisdom of those that espouse them; nor indeed from their being true; but only from the care, impartiality, and honesty with which they are embraced by us. Truth has the same force, in whose hands soever it is, and whosoever may be the happy discoverer of it; altho' its progress may be quicker under the direction of more skilful and able defenders.

It need only farther to be observed, that altho' this argument is designed, without formality, as a just and strict demonstration; yet that the author has not confined himself to an over-scrupulous use of the same word in

all places for the same idea ; because he thought it a needless preciseness, and has taken due care that the circumstances in which any word stands in different senses, shall plainly shew that sense he intends, to the fair inquirer : and it would be impertinent and useless, and hardly possible, to apply some words in one sense only. Thus particularly, reason easily signifies either the faculty or object of the mind ; and is also clearly understood to mean sometimes the motive or rule of action, and sometimes the ground and foundation of any truth or existence. Thus also judgment is used either for the capacity or decision of the understanding. In like manner necessity and necessary are used in a relative or absolute sense ; and are easily understood to mean an hypothetical, argumentative, moral, natural or absolute necessity, as the several reasonings require ; and can mislead none that are

are willing to attend : and this liberty is not to be avoided, without an unreasonable stiffness or formal affectation. Moral inquiries especially, which admit not of mathematical evidence, must be attended with some difficulty and uncertainty to the careless and vicious. They are in their own natures fitted for the exercise of integrity and sincerity in the search of truth ; and therefore the wise and virtuous only shall understand, and he that hath ears to hear will bear.

I would not be thought, by any thing that I have said, to presume that all wisdom and honesty is on this side the question. The argument that I have advanced seems indeed to me to be the truth ; and I am not sensible of any neglect or partiality in my inquiries : but I well know, that very wise and good men do not see this reasoning in the light I do. Some
do

do not readily enter into the language of these papers, tho' I am not able to express myself more intelligibly. Some see not the force of the argument, and yet do not deny the truths asserted: and there are some who do not perceive the first principles upon which we proceed. These may all be fair and honest inquirers after truth, tho' not capable of conviction by any thing I can offer. Some do not perceive the proof of any real existence. Some who allow all truth and the existence of God to be necessary, see not that therefore necessity is the cause, foundation, or reason of both: which to me appears to be the same thing. Some again deny that all effects require a cause, and have no idea of a necessary cause, or of any cause that is not an agent; and are content to say, that God exists without cause; and that there is no reason or ground of truth. I fear it is there-

(xv).

therefore impossible for me to give much satisfaction to such as are in these several ways of thinking: but I shall be glad to afford any light to those who think the subject worth their attention, and are willing to accept of my best endeavours.



(v)

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T H E



THE
ARGUMENT *a Priori*
CONSIDER'D.

ALL true religion, natural and revealed, is founded upon the existence and perfections of God; and the excellency, usefulness, and stability of every man's religious profession, will ever be in proportion to the truth and reasonableness of his conceptions concerning the *nature* of that deity, upon whom he depends, and whose honour he intends to promote in all his behaviour: for the great aim of *religion* is to be like the God we worship, and to do those things which may please him.

THE evidences of the being and perfections of God, are most obvious to every rational

tional mind, upon the consideration of every part of *nature*, which can only be the work of this mighty Being ; and therefore *they* are utterly without excuse, who do not infer the eternal power and godhead from the things that are made. Nevertheless, if we would be firmly persuaded not only of the *actual*, but of the *necessary* existence of God, we must take our arguments from the *necessary nature* of that Being, who is the first cause and author of all things. This is the argument *a priori*: The notion of which I shall endeavour to state and represent, as well as I can, in the plainest and most intelligible manner, together with the great *usefulness* and *importance* of it in all moral inquiries; and then I will faithfully collect and consider all the objections and difficulties that I have met with, or can frame against this way of reasoning.

§ 1. THE argument *a priori*, is an argument taken from the necessary nature of *things*, or of *truth*, or of *God* (for in this sense, strictly and without a figure, *God is truth*, as will afterwards appear) concerning the *existence*, and necessary *perfections*, of that great Being, who is the cause and author of all things. All truths have a necessary *foundation* in the nature of things; and though they may demonstrate to us, one the other, in the way of argumentation; yet are they equally and independently
true

true and necessary. Truth cannot depend upon any *prior cause* or *being* (which is the common mistake in this argument) but is itself *necessary* in its own nature: not *necessary* to our *argument*, or to account for certain phænomena or facts that we perceive, for this is only an hypothetical necessity; but *absolutely* and *independently*, as of our existence or conception, so also of the *will* of God himself. Thus also the existence of God is *necessary truth*; a *fact* in the necessary nature of things: and whereas all other facts are by their natures, *contingent* and *dependent* on the will of some being; *this fact*, and *this alone*, partakes of the nature of *truth*, and is itself strictly *necessary*. This seems not to have been duly attended to: The *fact* of God's existence having been consider'd together with other facts, which all require proofs *a posteriori*, whereas *this only* is *necessary fact* or existence; necessarily true *a priori*, or by the *necessity* of its own nature, like all other *truth*.

THIS notion of the existence of God being *necessary fact*, or of the nature of *truth*, seems to me to give light to the argument *a priuci*. By *fact* here, it is plain, I do not mean the same idea with which that word is commonly connected; for all other facts are proper *contingencies*; but this fact is *necessary*, as all other truth is, as it relates to the existence of some *substance*, which is *necessary*; whereas other truths re-

late only to proportions and the like, which are more strictly *ideal*. Thus then, as we come at the existence of other facts (and of this too, considered as a *fact* only, and not *necessary fact*) by experience and reasoning *a posteriori*, as we must needs do ; the *necessary fact* of God's existence is only to be proved *a priori*, from the nature of truth and necessity. Arguments *a posteriori*, or from effects, can only prove God's existence to be a *truth* or a *fact* ; but can never prove it to be *necessary truth or fact*.

ALL things that do exist, must have a *cause* or *reason* of their existence : there must be a reason why they *exist*, rather than *not exist*. The will of the almighty Agent may well be, and truly is, the *cause* or *reason* of the existence of all things that ever did, do, or can exist ; his own existence only excepted, which it is absurd to suppose to be an *effect* of his own *will*. There is then only one other possible *cause* or *reason* of existence, and that is *necessity*. God therefore, who cannot possibly depend on any being for existence, must exist by *necessity*, as all *truth* does. God is the *cause* and *author* of all other existence : *necessity* is the *cause* (not indeed *author*, for this word signifies a prior agent) of God's existence. This *cause* is not *prior* to the *effect* in the *actual* nature of things, as all causes are to their *temporary effects* ; although it be *prior* in the *order* of our conception, even as *necessity* is the ground and

and foundation of all truth, although not prior to any truth, but in the order of our conception. All truth has a necessary foundation in the nature of things, although every truth is independent of every thing but its own necessity. Thus the existence of God, which is necessary truth, is founded alone upon its own necessity: and thus necessity may well be considered as the Argument *a priori* for the existence of God.

I am not asserting that this is our argument, to prove the being and existence of God: This is quite another matter. Our way of proving *this*, or any other truth, may not shew the foundation of its existence; far otherwise: The existence of God, and of all truth, depends not upon us, and much less on our way of conceiving it; but is independently necessary. If no argument but *a posteriori* could prove the existence of God, it could not be proved at all, if nothing *a posteriori* did exist; but surely it would not be the less true, but founded on the highest reason and necessity. Nevertheless, as the considering and comparing our ideas relating to other truths, brings to our conception the necessity of their nature; so when we have got the idea of the existence of a first cause, and considered and compared the nature and relations of such a being, we arrive by certain and infallible steps to the necessary nature of that existence.

HERE

HERE now appears the common and artful fallacy, of objecting to a cause *prior* to the *first*; and to an argument *a priori*, taken from reasonings *a posteriori*. The *cause* here is not *prior* to the *effect*, as nothing can be *prior* to *truth*, although all *truth* has a necessary *cause* and *foundation*: and we do not arrive at *necessary* existence, by reasoning *a posteriori*, but at the *actual* existence only of a *first cause*. The *necessary existence* of God can only be come at by the argument *a priori*, which does not prove the *existence* of a *first cause* (that is proved by the *existence* of every *phænomenon*) but the *necessary nature* of that Being who is the author and cause of all things. But this objection will be answer'd more largely by and by.

IN order to prove the *actual* existence of some one cause and author of all things, we need go no farther than our own *existence*, or that of any other being: for if any thing does exist, there must also exist some *first cause* or author of all things. But then this argument does by no means shew the *ground* or *foundation* of his *existence*, who must nevertheless exist by some *necessary reason* or *cause*; otherwise his *existence* is only an *actual fact*, like all other facts, and will appear to be *contingent*, nay, rather absurd. For as God cannot possibly exist by the *will* of any being; if there is also no other reason or ground of his *existence*,

existence, it may as well be affirmed, that he *does not*, as that he *does* exist. But since he does exist, there must be some *foundation* of his existence; and that can only be *necessity*, which is also the *foundation* of all *truth*.

To assert that God does exist *without any cause*, or that there is no *reason, ground or foundation* of God's existence, seems to be the same as to say that he does *not exist*: for he must exist *necessarily*, or not at all. So likewise, to affirm that there is no *reason or ground* for the *truth* of any proposition, is the same as to say, it is *not true*, or that there is no *reason* for the affirmation, since all *truth* is *necessary*.

AND although God, who is by arguments *a posteriori* proved to be the cause and author of beings, must therefore have existed *eternally*, because otherwise he could never have existed *at all*; yet this *eternity* of existence does by no means shew the *cause or reason* of his existence: for *eternity* is only a *mode* of existence, as *infinity* also is; neither of which will prove that he exists *necessarily* (for they relate not to the *foundation*, but to the *manner* of his existence.) But supposing *necessity* to be the *ground or foundation* of his existence, it will follow immediately, that a *necessary Being* must be *eternal* and *infinite*: because such a cause must have *such* an effect; of which more afterwards. Thus by arguments *a posteriori* we

we come at the *actual* existence of God ; and from the *nature* of a *first cause*, or the *nature* of things, that is, by an argument *a priori*, we come at his *necessary* existence.

THE idea of *space*, is only the idea of the necessary infinite extension of this necessary Being ; and the idea of *duration* is only the idea of the necessary eternity of this necessary Being. They are both real ideas of the *necessary modes* of God's existence, not the ideas of *nothing* : neither of substance, mode, property, proportion or relation, as some have vainly imagined ; for that is the same as *no idea*.

THIS leads me to observe, that necessity cannot possibly be conceived as a *mode* or *property* of God's existence ; like *eternity* or *infinity*, or the like : for these relate only to the *manner* of his existence, not in any respect to the *cause* : that is to say, God's *eternity* or *infinity*, though never so fully proved, can only argue his *actual* existence, and so does the *finite* duration or space in which any being does exist, prove its *actual* existence : But the *cause* of its existence is not proved, or attempted to be proved, from these properties ; so neither is the *cause* of God's existence proved by his *infinite* properties. On the other hand, this *necessity* of existence, considered as the *cause* or *reason* of God's existence, does really and most evidently prove the necessary *eternity* and *infinity*, as well as all other natural perfections of the first

first cause. *Necessity* therefore is not a *property* of God's existence, but the *ground* and *foundation* of the existence of his *being* and all his *properties*: whereas no *property* can possibly relate to the *cause* of any being's existence.

THERE are some who will readily allow, that all *truth* is indeed *necessary*, and that God does *necessarily* exist; and yet do not see that *necessity* is therefore the *ground*, *reason*, or *cause* of *truth*, or of *God's existence*; because it is confessedly no *author* or *agent*, and has itself no distinct existence. This mistake seems to arise from inattention, and an incorrect connection of *sensible* things with objects of *reason*. *Cause* does not always imply *agency*; nor does *all* existence imply an *author*, though it does indeed require a *cause*. *Necessity* is, in the nature of its idea, a *cause*, and cannot possibly be conceived as an *effect*. *Truth* and *necessary existence* must be independent of all *will* or *agency*; and yet must have a *cause* or *reason* of *proportion* or *existence*, even *necessity*. The author of all beings cannot, himself, possibly have an *author*; yet must have a *foundation* or *reason* of *existence*, even *necessity*. If God does *necessarily* exist; either that *necessity* of *existence* is a *consequence* of *existence*, and then *all* things that exist, are also *necessary*; or the *existence* is a *consequence* of *necessity*: that is, *necessity* is the *cause* and

reason of God's existence, and of that existence only.

I cannot help observing in this place, that those who are the most unwilling to confess that *necessity* is the *cause* or *foundation* of God's existence, are yet most apt to recur to *necessity*, as the *universal cause* of *all things* or *actions*. This, though a needless concession, and indeed absurd, seems however to shew the natural force of our argument *a priori*; for as we can easily account for every natural effect from the *agency* of God and creatures, only insisting on *necessity* as the *cause* or *foundation* of *truth* and of God's *existence*; those who deny this are evidently forced upon *necessity* as the *cause* of all things: plainly for this reason, because *necessity*, as *some cause*, cannot possibly be avoided. How much more consistently then may these gentlemen admit of *necessity* as the *ground* of God's existence, than be driven to it as the *cause* of every phænomenon in nature, to the destruction of all religion and virtue!

IT has been very ingeniously argued, for the *necessity* of God's existence, that the *idea* of existence being in itself a *possible* idea, and yet that existence being impossible, without the supposition of some *necessary* being, the cause and author of all other existence; it follows, that the *possibility* of *any* existence proves the *necessary* existence of some Being. But here, I think, *possibility* is sadly misapply'd. *Possibility* can only relate to *uncertainty*

tainty and to contingent existence; and is absurdly predicated of truth and necessary existence. No one would assert the possibility of proportions and relations. The whole is not possibly, but certainly greater than a part; and the three angles of a triangle are not possibly, but certainly, equal to two right angles. Possibility of existence will never prove even actual contingent existence; much less necessary existence. It is too great a step in reasoning from possibility of existence, (that is, that existence implies no contradiction, or may be, if there is a power sufficient to produce it) to actual existence, or necessary existence; which thus, it is absurdly supposed, may be or not be. Indeed that which appears possible, can never become, in its own nature, impossible: but there is no arguing from possibility to existence.

I am far from supposing the deception of our knowledge of truth; on the contrary, I assert the certainty of it, when carefully and duly attended to. But then it must not be extended beyond its capacities or foundation; nor must conclusions be carried beyond their allowed premises. It is enough, if with diligence and care we may arrive at such knowledge of truth as our capacities will reach, and is good for us.

ALL knowledge supposes that we have faculties capable of discerning the difference between truth and falsehood. To imagine that nevertheless we may be deceived in

matters of *real* science, is to destroy all our foundations of knowledge, and to make all inquiries vain. If truth, and right, and reason, is *one idea* in the *divine* mind, and quite *another* in the *human* understanding, there can to us be no rule of truth, right, or reason: neither can we possibly say or imagine what *those ideas* are in the supream intellect: and so all enquiries after *truth* and *virtue*, are uncertain, foolish, and useless: and if *those* are so, which are the *best* and *highest* (I had almost said the *only*) things that are worth our concern; much less is there any certainty or knowledge to be acquired in *other* matters, which must therefore be reckoned infinitely more vain and useless. If truth, right, and reason, which are the proper objects of the understanding, and as we think capable of strict demonstration, as far as we can go, are nevertheless uncertain ideas, and mere delusion; how unhappy are we, to be left in our highest concerns to arguments of bare facts or probabilities, in which we know deception is very *possible*, and errors and mistakes the common lot of men! But I hope we may affirm the contrary to be the truth: and that the condition of every intelligent Being, and particularly of the human race, is more happy and worthy of a wise and good creator. Surely the facts and probabilities we converse with, are *realities*, or at least such deceptions as cannot hurt us, because their realities or appearances

pearances are such as were designed by God to engage our affections and pursuits according to our best apprehensions: But our capacities of reason and understanding were given us on purpose to discern *truth* and the *obligations* of virtue. And as truth and reason are the only *objects* of the understanding, it cannot be, that the determinations of this supream faculty of intelligence, should be liable to error or mistake, when we faithfully use it, and cautiously conclude no farther than we really discern.

THE degree of excellency or perfection of the understanding, consists not in the degree of *certainty* with which it perceives truth, which really admits of no degrees; but in the degree of its *capacity* to discern *other* or *more* truths. So far as it has pleased God to endue men with understanding, the truths which they perceive, are the same ideas in the *human*, and in the *divine* mind. Where the ideas differ, one spirit perceives *farther* than another: or men, which is very common, conclude without premises, hastily or viciously. Thus what is really understood to be *possible*, without mistake, cannot, in the nature of things, be *impossible*; that which is really understood to be *true*, can in no case be *false*; and that which is understood to be truly *impossible*, can by no power or contrivance become *possible*. Things may be blended, partially considered, or taken upon trust; and so they may be hardly or perhaps

perhaps not at all discerned by us ; or we may fondly or presumptuously determine : But this is our own *fault*, and not to be charged upon our narrow capacities, or the uncertain natures of things.

ALL truth and all moral obligation is founded upon *necessity*, and admits not of *probable*, only *necessary* evidence. So far as we perceive these, they are the infallible natures of things, and the invariable rule of all rational behaviour. The *deceptions* that our senses are liable to, can never interrupt *this knowledge*. Whatever is understood to be demonstrably *true*, or a rational *obligation*, is certainly *so*, and the rule of our *duty*, however *sensible* appearances may be mistaken. Therefore, by the way, the *existence* of God, and all *moral obligation*, has a secure foundation in *truth* and *reason*, whatever uncertainties attend other enquiries : and more particularly, however we may mistake *natural* truths or *contingent* facts and circumstances, from the relations, proportions, and fitnesses of which, as they appear to us, all *moral obligations* arise ; yet we can never mistake the *obligations* themselves, because they arise not from the *natures of things*, otherwise than as we apprehend them : or rather that *nature of things* which constitutes our *obligations*, particularly includes our *capacities* and *apprehensions*. But this reasoning would lead me off from the subject of my present enquiry. To return then,

then, I think enough has been said about the proof *a priori*, concerning the *existence* of God: Let us next see how this argument stands with respect to the *natural perfections* of the deity.

THIS argument seems to afford the only proof of the proper and absolute *eternity* of God. These visible temporary phænomena, considered as the effect of some first cause, most evidently prove the *actual existence* of their author, in some part of duration; nay, supposing that they constantly need the same supporting influence, they prove that their maker does *now* exist, and is at least *coeval* with their duration: and further, the *actual existence* of this first cause, plainly infers that he did *always* exist; otherwise he could never have existed. Nevertheless these phænomena may possibly be *delusions*; and no wonder if in some degree they do certainly deceive our narrow capacities: but above all, if there be really no cause or foundation of God's *existence*; neither can there be any cause or foundation of his *duration*: for however these phænomena may be allowed to prove his *existence*, they can never posibly be thought to be the *cause* or *reason* of his Being or duration, *necessity* only, as before, can be that *cause* or *reason*: and that is sufficient *foundation* for the divine *eternity*. Every *effect* will continue as long as the *cause* of it continues to operate: and therefore all *contingent* being will endure as long as

as *God*, who is the *author* and *cause* of *that* existence, *wills* its duration; and therefore *God* himself will continue to exist as long as *necessity*, which is the *ground* and *reason* of *his* existence, continues to operate; that is, necessarily *for ever*.

IT is most evident then, that if *necessity* be the ground of *God's* existence, it must equally take place throughout all duration: for such a *cause* must have a constant uniform *effect* at all times; and therefore only *God* is properly *eternal*, from everlasting to everlasting; because the *reason* of his existence must necessarily be always the same. Some have indeed pretended to affirm that *necessity* itself may be a contingency, and require also a *cause* or *foundation*; but this I take to be a mere fiction of opposition. It is to ask why *necessity* is *necessary*? and to doubt whether *necessity* itself will continue. These absurdities are too gross to be admitted into consideration.

WITHOUT this argument *a priori*, no proof can possibly be given of *God's* *eternal past duration*: for although he does *now* exist; yet there being no *reason* or *foundation* of his existence, he may possibly in some time past *not* have existed: and although *that* is inconsistent with his *present* existing; so also is his *present* existence *absurd*, without *cause* or *reason*; much less can his *future* duration be inferr'd from his *present* existence without *cause* or *reason*: for he may full as probably, the next moment, *cease to exist*

exist without cause or reason. Nay, the truth is, if there is really *no cause* or *foundation* of his existence, it is a demonstration that he never *did* or *can* exist: and all the evidence of his existence taken from the apparent phænomena that we converse with, *may*, and indeed upon *that supposition*, *must*, deceive us; and so all our conclusions and reasonings, even those taken from our own existence, are mere *chimeras*: To such absurdities are we driven by denying the force of the argument *a priori*.

NOR can we better succeed in proving the absolute *infinity* of God. This world, and every part of the universe, proves indeed the *actual* existence of some first cause and author in that part of space wherein they were produced, or do exist: but they cannot be an evidence even of the *actual* existence of God in any *other* parts of space; and being themselves *finite*, do not therefore infer *infinity*. Much less can they prove the *necessary* infinity of the Deity: for those things that themselves exist by his will and power alone, cannot possibly be considered as any *cause* or *foundation* of his existence. The only proof then of the *absolute infinity* of God, must be the *necessity* of his existence. This indeed considered, as it really is, as the *cause* or *reason* of the divine existence, does plainly infer *absolute infinity*: for *this cause* cannot possibly operate in some *parts* of space only; but being a *necessary cause*, its effect must

take place *necessarily* in *all* space, and consequently be the foundation of *absolute infinity*. And as all *contingent* existence takes place in *that* space wherein God the *author* of it *wills* it to exist ; so God's existence must take place in *all* space wherein the *cause* or *reason* of his existence, which is *necessity*, operates ; and that is throughout *all* space. Some indeed, in order to avoid the *force* of this argument, have thought fit to deny the *extension* even of this *infinite* Being. This is not only an absurdity in terms, but amounts plainly to a flat denial of the *existence* of God : for I see not the least difference between existing *nowhere*, and *not existing at all*. I need not farther enlarge on this argument, because it differs very little from the former.

ANOTHER natural perfection of God, which can alone be proved by this argument, is the divine *unity*. This has ever been allow'd in all times, and under all dispensations, by the worshipers of the true God, to be an essential perfection of the Deity, and the foundation of all true religion. And however it has lately, for the sake of some favourite principles, been doubted, disputed, or denied ; I believe that neither *natural* nor *revealed* religion can be well supported without it. What religious principles those are which can even *stand* without this great truth, or which imply the *denial* of it, I leave those who are concerned to consider ; as well as to what ends and purposes they can

can be embraced and maintained; Taking however the *unity* of God to be a most important truth, I shall proceed to shew how it depends upon this argument *a priori.*

THE existence of those things we converse with, or of the universe, proves indeed that there is *at least* some one Being, who is the *cause* or *author* of it: and *one only* is in this sense *necessary*, to account for these phenomena. But this will by no means prove that they are the works of *one only* first cause: for it does not appear that there may not be many first causes or authors, *each* of his *own* particular operations; acting *each* in his *own* sphere, and *independent* of one another, or otherwise. They must therefore be each *coeval* at least with their *own* works, and extended with them. Nay, I see no absurdity in allowing that they *may* be also properly and actually *eternal* and *infinite*, tho' these their works and all arguments *a posteriori* can never prove them to be so. But all this gives us not the least evidence, that the cause and author of these phenomena is really *one* Being, *one only* supreme God. How then shall we prove and maintain this most important article of all true religion? I see no evidence but from the argument *a priori.* This does indeed prove it demonstrably: for if *necessity*, considered as a *cause*, be the *reason* and *foundation* of God's existence; all the effects of *necessity* must be *infinite*: and *necessity* being the *foundation* of all *truth*,

there can possibly be but *one truth* of a kind. Thus all *proportions* and *relations* are necessarily *one*. The *equality* or *proportion* of *two* to *two*, or of *two* to *three*, is *one only* equality or proportion. It may be the *equality* or *proportion* of a *greater* or *less* magnitude; nevertheless it is not a *greater* or *less* equality or proportion, but *one only* proportion or *equality*: as the three angles of a triangle are *equal* to two right angles, with a *sameness* of *equality*, if I may so say; and as *twice two* is *equal* to *four*, *once only* and for *ever*, tho' never so often applied. Thus it is absurd to suppose *two infinite spaces*, or *two eternities*; for they must necessarily *coincide*: and so the existence of God being *necessary truth*, *necessity* cannot be the *cause* or *foundation* of *two existences*, but of *one only*; for this plain reason, because *one existence*, caused by *necessity*, must be *infinite* every way, or, as it were, contain *all necessary being*. All *causes* must produce *effects* according to their natures. The cause of all *contingent existence* being the *will* of God, just so many *contingent Beings* may exist as he *wills* to exist; and therefore also *necessity* being capable only of *one necessary effect*, *necessary existence* can be but *one effect* of a *necessary cause*. *Necessity* can admit of *no limits* in its effects; nor can it cause *two infinite Beings*, or *two eternal Beings*, to exist; for they would nevertheless coincide, and be *one only*, because *necessary*. Thus the unity of God stands upon the foundation

dation of all truth, that is, it is a *necessary mode* of God's existence; or *unity* is essential to that Being, who exists by *necessity*.

THERE are yet several other natural perfections of the Deity, which remain to be consider'd, as deducible from this argument; but they differ from the former several ways. Hitherto the argument *a priori* has been applied only to prove the *existence, eternity, infinity, and unity* of God, all which properly belong to his *substance*, distinct from his *spirituality, agency, power, and wisdom*; altho' these are also *natural* perfections, and therefore derive from the same *cause or reason*, which is *necessity*, but do not appear exactly in the same light. The *spirituality* of God is consequent upon his *consciousness* and *agency*; and therefore is not to be consider'd as a *distinct* perfection. I shall proceed then to shew by this argument, that God is necessarily an *agent*.

THE idea of *necessary existence* has been shewn not only to be a *possible* idea, but a *necessary truth*. *Contingent existence* also I suppose is both *possible* and real. But this cannot be *possible*, unless we first suppose some *necessary existence*, who may produce this contingent Being, as I have before observed. Now this *first* and *necessary* Being, or *author* and *cause* of all other Being, must be an *agent* in this production, or else the *contingent* Being will be a *necessary effect* of this *necessary* Being, even while it is yet confess'd

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to be contingent, which is absurd. All effects of a necessary inactive Being must be equally necessary with that Being ; or rather, are part of the idea of that necessary Being, and are founded upon the same necessity as their cause ; which necessity can only be the cause of one necessary Being, as is before proved. Therefore the author or cause of contingent existence must necessarily be an agent : and if he be an agent, necessity, as it is the cause and foundation of his nature and existence, must also be the ground of his agency. I think I need not add, that God is not therefore a necessary agent, (this being a contradiction in terms, as agency essentially implies self-motion and activity;) but only necessarily an agent : which is very different.

HOWEVER, I must observe here, that agency admits not of degrees, but is in its nature simple, uniform, and perfect ; there being no difference between one agent and another, but in the instances of their agency. So far as any being is free, or has self-motion and activity, so far only it is an agent : and so far as it is restrained or over-ruled, so far, and in those instances, it is not an agent, but subject to the agency of other beings. Therefore the perfection of God's agency does not consist in his acting more freely than other agents in those instances wherein they are allowed to act at all ; but in being subject to no impediments or restraints in any instances that may be beyond or above the power

power of other agents ; or more strictly, wherein they are no agents at all : not for want of agency in general, but for want of wisdom and power to effect those instances : As my power to walk depends not upon my agency, but upon my make and strength ; and the loss of my legs takes not away my agency, which I before exerted in walking, but my natural power only. Perfection therefore in degree of agency there strictly is none ; or rather, all agency, as such, is perfect : but that Being is very properly styled a perfect agent, who has also all knowledge and power. This then must be proved of the one necessary eternal and infinite agent.

ALL knowledge relates to truth and fact, there being no other objects of the sense or understanding. Now all fact, except only that necessary fact of God's existence, being the mere production of the will of God, cannot but be known to him. And since he is the one necessary Being, who is the author of all things that do or can exist ; he must necessarily know all facts and existences, which are no other than the exertions of his own will and power. The actions of all dependent beings are necessarily done in his universe, and under his inspection, and are therefore necessarily known to him ; as all the effects of them are the productions of his own will. All truth is necessary, and the knowledge of it is in proportion to the capacity and active intelligence of any Being.

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Any degree of intelligence in nature proves intelligence to be in the first author of all things. As surely therefore as there is *any* idea of truth in *any* mind, so surely is the origin of *all* intelligence in the *divine* mind. Our understandings, as well as our existence, and all other our capacities, are necessarily limited by the will of our maker : but the understanding of God must be necessarily infinite ; because this, as all the other natural perfections of the Deity, is founded on necessity, which cannot be the cause or reason of any partial and limited intelligence, but extends necessarily to *all* truth ; for no reason can possibly be given *a priori*, or as founded in the divine nature, for any degree of knowledge in God, but must necessarily extend to all possible knowledge. Arguments *a posteriori* may prove God's knowledge as far as these phænomena extend, or seem to require, but no farther : it is only *a priori* that we can strictly prove that the divine understanding is properly infinite. All truth is necessary and universal, extending to all things and truths to which it can relate ; admits, supposes, and is perfectly consistent with all other truth : even so the great and necessary truth and fact of God's existence and perfections extends to *all* truth ; is, as I may say, coeval with it, and necessarily intelligent of *all* truth. He is not indeed the author of truth, any more than truth is the cause of his existence ; all truth being necessarily

sarily independent, and equally founded on necessity: but He is a necessary, eternal, infinite living Intelligence; and therefore as some truths only are the objects of our finite understandings, all truth is necessarily the object of his infinite understanding.

IT remains that we apply the foregoing argument to prove the power of God. All power supposes agency: for we are not speaking of power in the physical sense, wherein it means or measures only the effect; but of active power, or the first cause of effects. Now that God has all power, or that nothing has existed, does or can exist but by his power and agency, is evident from his being the only cause and author of all things: but these phenomena, or this universe which we see, or imagine to exist, will prove no more power in God than is sufficient to have produced them, and to continue them in being: nay, I fear it will not prove so much; for it does by no means follow, that because He has produced and maintain'd hitherto these several phenomena, that therefore He has, and will continue to have, the same power of producing a like phenomenon, or of continuing to maintain these. The power that God appears to have exerted in creating the universe, does not declare the cause or foundation of this power; and yet if there be no reason or ground of the existence of this power, it may also without reason or ground cease to exist: and if these

visible or supposed phænomena were evidences of the present and durable power of God, they are far enough from proving the divine power to be *infinite*: for then these phænomena must be *infinite*, which is not only contrary to all truth and appearance, but indeed *impossible*; since hereby *infinite* power would be *exhausted*, which is absurd. Nay farther yet, if it be said, that all Beings that have been, do, or can exist, with all their powers and capacities necessarily deriving from his will and power, he must therefore have all *possible* power: this is far from proving that he has absolutely *infinite* and *almighty* power; and is indeed asserting no more than that God can do *all* that he *can* do: which being *unknown* and *indeterminate*, is not really proving *any* power, no, not so much as the continuance of what he has *already* exerted. But if we apply the argument *a priori*, and make *necessity* the *ground* and *reason* of his power, as of his *existence* and all his other *natural* perfections: *some* power being necessary to the existence of *any* contingent Being; and *contingent* existence being plainly *possible*, as well as, by all the demonstration of our senses, a *reality*; no reason can be given why *necessity* should be the *ground* and *foundation* of *any* power, that will not equally prove it to be absolutely *almighty* power throughout *all space*, and throughout *all duration*.

THIS then seems to me to be the *nature* and *force* of the argument *a priori*, applied to the *existence* and *natural perfections* of God, by which this great *truth* and *fact* is demonstrated ; that there does necessarily exist one, eternal, infinite, all-wise, and almighty Being ; whose existence and perfection is founded upon *necessity*, as all truth is.

I SHALL now, as I proposed, endeavour to shew the great use and importance of this doctrine in all *moral* enquiries.

Sect. 2. THE sincere and faithful belief of an infinite, eternal, all-wise, and almighty author and director of all things, has ever been accounted a first principle of all true religion ; and very justly. For altho' the foundation of all obligation to *morality* or *right action* is indeed *necessary* ; and, like all truth, *independent* of the existence of God, or of any other truth ; it being always *necessarily reasonable* to act *reasonably*, whatever else is true or false : yet the *existence* and *perfection* of God being also *necessary truth*, and our *dependance* upon him being also *necessary* ; this truth cannot be *inconsistent* with that ; and our right action must be in dependance upon that mighty Being, who has bestow'd upon us all our powers and capacities, and who alone can support us in the practice of virtue, amidst the trials and imperfections of that state in which he has placed us ; and secure the happy event

of our stedfast and faithful perseverance. Now if this be so, how desirable and advantageous will it be, to have this great principle of the existence and perfection of God fixed upon the most certain and infallible foundation? And what foundation can possibly be so sure as *necessity* itself? Great and many are the evidences of the *actual* Being and perfections of God, taken from the beauty, order, magnificence, and usefulness of the things which do appear; and in these we may and ought to delight ourselves continually. But, alas! how little do we see or conceive! How liable are we to delusion and mistake! And above all, how far short do all our perceptions and imaginations come of *absolute infinity and perfection*! The Almighty is not to be measured even by *all* his works: for his power and perfections are *still* the same, not decreased or lessened by any thing that he *has* done, or indeed *can* do: for his power and perfections are *infinite*. These phænomena with which we converse, or all that we can imagine, will only carry us in the effects to a cause and author *sufficient* to produce *them*; but can never carry us to a Being absolutely *infinite* and *eternal*, the almighty and wise Author of these and all *possible* phænomena. No! the premises are not equal to the conclusion by any means.

HERE only can we fix a certain and solid assurance; that as all *truth* and all *existence* must

must have some ground or reason, why it is rather *true* than *false*; rather *exists* than *does not exist*; this great truth also of the divine existence must, in like manner, have some *ground* or *foundation*, which can be no other than *necessity*, as we have seen; the *ground* and *foundation* of all truth. Upon this everlasting rock may we safely build our dependance for all the perfections of the Deity. From this *cause* or *foundation* will infallibly arise, as we have demonstrated, the *eternity*, *infinity*, *unity*, *perfect wisdom*, and *almighty power* of God. Indeed the *moral perfections* of the Deity cannot be proved by the same argument: and *these* are the great encouragements and supports to us in the practice of virtue. But altho' these *moral perfections* of God are not in their nature strictly capable of proof *a priori*; yet are these *natural perfections*, which have *a priori* been proved to be *necessary*, the only mediums by which the *moral perfections* can be proved at all. Thus

MORALITY is the *practice* of reason. Every Being is morally excellent in proportion as he faithfully uses all his powers in the *practice* of *reason* or in *right action*. This is not the place to enter any farther into the criterion of virtue, or rule of right in our moral conduct. Every man's own conscience faithfully consulted will sufficiently direct him. *Agency* indeed is necessary to constitute a capacity of morality: and

and that necessarily implies a natural power of acting *wrong* as well as *right*. The powers and perfections of God are, as we see, infinite, and admit of no limitation: nevertheless he is also necessarily an agent, and therefore must have a *natural* power of doing *good* or *evil*. And therefore it is, because his moral character must depend upon his *will*, that his moral perfections cannot be proved *a priori*, or from *necessity*. This would be absurd. But as we are sure that his natural perfections are *necessary* and *infinite*, and he must see all *truth* and all things to be as they really are, and he must also see the *necessary obligations* to all *right* and *reasonable* actions in all circumstances, and must prefer, in his infinite judgment, *truth* to *falshood*, *right* to *wrong*, *reasonable* to *unreasonable* action; and moreover must be infinitely removed from all possible *passion* or *affection*, which might be a motive *contrary* to reason: we cannot but conclude with full assurance, equal to any demonstration, tho' built indeed upon *moral certainty* only, that this almighty and perfect Being ever *has* acted, *does* and *will* act, in all cases and circumstances, according to *perfect reason* and *truth*: and that as we are morally excellent so far as we faithfully endeavour to practise virtue in our *imperfect* state, in proportion to our *imperfect* capacities; God therefore has truly all moral *perfection*, as he ever acts, in his *perfect* manner,

ner, with infinite capacity, according to perfect reason and truth.

THIS argument also, by demonstrating beyond all contradiction the existence and perfection of God, takes off the greatest, and indeed only difficulty, that sometimes arises in framing just and true notions of moral virtue. It is evident, that reason and truth require constant and faithful obedience to all the obligations of morality at all times and in all circumstances; and yet there may easily be put cases (and it cannot be denied that they sometimes come to pass) wherein very great pleasure and temptation lie on the side of unreasonable and vicious behaviour; too great sometimes to be withstood by such Beings as we are, if there were no extrinsic support of virtue and truth: nay, it is easy to suppose instances wherein all the happiness, perhaps existence, of imperfect beings may be lost and extinguish'd in the faithful perseverance of truth and virtue, if there were not assuredly a Being of infinite power and goodness, reason and truth, to support and reward them in the end, for their resolution and integrity. And were there not such a Being to support and defend the practice of truth in such instances, it would be extremely hard, nay unreasonable, for moral and sensible Beings to part with all their happiness and existence too, for the sake of truth and virtue: For what indeed is truth and virtue to any rational

tional and sensible being, who must give up his very happiness and existence in the pursuit of it? — But can we allow that it can ever be reasonable to act unreasonably? or unreasonable to act reasonably? This is too gross an absurdity to be born. It must therefore be a necessary truth, that there does exist some mighty Being, to secure the practice of virtue, and deliver the moral world from inevitable moral confusion. Nevertheless this would be the case, if the existence of God were not necessary truth; and this moral absurdity would by no means prove that such a Being must exist: for there is no consequence from the reasonableness of moral virtue, to the existence of God; neither if there was, is that any cause or foundation of God's existence: nor will the mere actual existence of God save this great moral absurdity; for if the non-existence of God be a possibility, or if his existence is not necessary, all the absurdity will still remain: for the possibility of an absurdity is itself absurd. If it were possible that the practice of reason could be, in any case, unreasonable, it would be the highest absurdity. So necessary is it to admit the argument *a priori* concerning the Being and perfections of God, or that necessity is the ground and foundation of God's existence and perfection.

ANOTHER very great use of this argument is, to silence effectually all objections and reasonings of atheistical writers. No other

other arguments can do it. All reasoning *a posteriori*, from visible phænomena and *actual* effects, is defective; for, besides that they really do not reach to *necessary* existence and *infinite* perfection, they may moreover be denied real existence, or be supposed to proceed from an *infinite series* of causes and effects; which can never be disproved by him who only insists upon every thing's having a cause, and denies the *necessary* existence of some one *first cause*. Those indeed who will persist in denying all real existence, or the necessary relation and dependence of causes and effects, cannot be disputed with at all: But if these are allow'd, no arguments but such as are taken from the nature of necessary existence can be effectual. How can *he* confute the *eternal* existence of *matter*, or the accidental concourse of *atoms* to the production of the universe, who believes that the Maker of all things does himself exist without *cause* or *reason*; and may therefore without *cause* cease to exist? In short, that the *existence* of God is itself an *accident*, and quite *unaccountable*? But if the *existence* of God is shewn to be *necessary truth* and *fact*, as evident and as certain as any other true relation or proportion, that is, as sure as *necessity*; what pretence or refuge is left for atheism, or any system of it? Here is ground sufficient for the *creation* and *support* of all things. This will account, in the most satisfactory manner,

ner, for every phænomenon. So far as we can discern, we shall ever find in all the works of God, the marks of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness ; and where our understanding fails us, we may safely conclude that all is just and right, because this most excellent and perfect Being does *necessarily* exist. Atheism itself will be confuted by the infallible assurance of God's *necessary* existence ; and all objections and difficulties about the nature and order of the creation will vanish, when we remember the *infinite* perfections of this *necessary* Being.

BUT once more : This argument will be found of great use in our reception and belief of all *true revelation*. This always supposes the existence of a supreme intelligent Agent, who is to give us particular notices of his will. Now, in the first place, thus only can be ascertain'd this necessary *foundation* ; and the *superstructure* cannot be more secure than the *ground* it stands upon. When this first principle of the existence and perfections of God is *sure* and *firm*, it is the greatest encouragement for us to hearken to any discoveries of his will. Those who argue only *a posteriori*, can only build their evidence upon *actual* and *apparent* existence, and upon *indefinite* perfections ; which will, I think, be ever attended with some doubts and uncertainties : but if our argument *a priori* be just, all this is secure as *necessity*, and every perfection *necessarily* infinite.

BESIDES, as in all revelation and discoveries of the divine will, there will be constant need of exercising our best and most faithful judgment, that we may perceive the evidences, and understand the *true* sense of the revelation ; here will be an unspeakable advantage in our inquiries ; as we shall be certain and secure in the *first* and *main* principles of all true religion, the necessary nature and perfections of God, and his true and perfect moral rectitude : from whence we may safely conclude, that all *true* revelation, and the *true* meaning of every discovery, must be consistent with, and agreeable to these *necessary* and *divine* truths ; and so we shall have an *infallible* rule to conduct us in examining the *evidences*, and inquiring into the *sense* of all revelation. This certainty have not those, who are less clear and secure in the nature and perfections of God ; whose arguments reach no farther than *possibilities*, *probabilities*, or at most, to the *actual* existence of the Deity, without *cause*, *ground*, or *reason*.

To this, I apprehend, must chiefly be attributed the loose, indeterminate, or absurd notions, that are so often received and maintained by the believers of revelation. They have no certain fix'd ground to proceed upon, and therefore are exposed to every delusion. No wonder ; they *begin* only where reason, and truth, and certainty *end* ; and so have no rational foundation whereon to build their faith and hope. Truth and reason must be the

ground of all our dependence ; then we may rationally attend to, and obey all the other discoveries of the divine will : but if we neglect this *first security*, and take all previous truth to be *needless*, and not worth our inquiries ; and thereupon *begin* at revelation, and frame all our principles upon *that*, neither truly believed or understood ; we must needs have very uncertain opinions about the most important truths, and be ever floating and doubting about the rule of our moral conduct. Hence those false, cruel, and impious notions of the Deity, uttered and insisted upon by some believers ; such as could never be deduced from the mere light of reason, how mistaken soever : they could never have been taught or received, but under pretence of some *arbitrary superstitious reverence*, independent of reason or common sense. Hence those doubts of some orthodox believers concerning the first principles of natural religion, the *unity* of God, and the necessary *moral differences* of actions ; truths which the wise and sober Heathens never doubted of. Hence those gloomy fears and dreadful apprehensions of even good men, lest the *all-wise* and most *bountiful* Creator should act *unreasonably* and *unkindly* towards his imperfect and dependent creatures ; and those no less absurd and groundless joys and comforts of some, in the *arbitrary partial fondness* of an infinitely holy and just Being, notwithstanding the immoral temper and behaviour
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of these his favourites. But far be it from the Almighty Judge of the universe to act *thus!* far, as *truth* from *falshood*, *right* from *wrong*, *necessity* of *existence* from *non-existence*!

THIS argument received in its full force and extent, would effectually secure all rational Beings from such absurd opinions, such vain and impious hopes and fears. Here then let us hold, whatever true or false revelations are made to us, or wickedly imposed upon us; that there is, as sure as *truth* and *necessity* can make it, one infinite, eternal, all-wise, and almighty Being, the author and cause of all things, who sees and knows all *truth* and all *obligations*, and who will always, and in all cases, act with perfect *reason*, and with infinite moral *rectitude*, and will therefore use and judge all his creatures kindly, righteously, and reasonably, in all states and circumstances for ever. And when these principles are fixed and settled in our minds upon sure and certain evidences, all true revelation will have its proper force and effect. All discoveries of the will of God vouchsafed us, beyond the natural dictates of our reason, may be attended to with due reverence, and faithfully obeyed. There can be no danger of receiving any principles upon *divine* authority contrary to the nature and perfections of *God*; nor of observing any rule of conduct contrary to *moral truth*, and the genuine dictates of *reason*: but every signification of the will and favour of the

Almighty

Almighty will be thankfully and impartially submitted to, honestly understood, and humbly obeyed, by every sincere lover of truth and virtue. So *favourable*, I may say *preparatory*, are all true principles of natural religion, to any *true* revelation ; and so necessary is this argument *a priori* to fix and establish *natural religion* upon the surest and only foundation ; *that of the necessary Being and perfections of God.*

THUS I have set the *nature* and *importance* of the argument *a priori* in the best light I am able ; and I have chose to do it in the *shortest* manner, that the *truth* or *mistake* of the reasoning may most easily and plainly appear. I have omitted nothing that seem'd material, tho' there is great room left to enlarge and improve the subject. All that remains is, to consider and reply to some objections that have been formed against this argument with perhaps very different views. Some very ingenious and thinking persons have, no doubt, felt real difficulties upon this subject : some have had great prejudices against this doctrine, as bearing hard upon received *important* principles that they are unwilling to give up : and some, I fear, have opposed it from worse motives, which I chuse not to name. However, my design being only to evince and maintain the truth, free from any personal or particular opposition, I shall take notice only of *such* as seem to have some weight, and have arisen in

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conversation or writing, or perhaps only in my own mind, without referring either to the persons or performances that may have brought these objections to my consideration.

Sect. 3. ONE mistake upon this subject has been, the perceiving that the existence of God, as a first cause and author, is *necessary* to account for the present phænomena, and the nature of *cause* and *effect*; but yet denying that therefore the being of God is in itself *necessary*, or that *necessity* is the *ground* or *reason* of his existence.

IT is very true, that this reasoning will not prove the *necessity* of God's existence. *That* is quite *another sort* of *necessity*; a *necessity* argued *a posteriori*, by which *actual* fact and existence may be discovered as certainly as the sensible mediums by which we reason may be depended upon: that is an *hypothetical* *necessity*, but will not shew us the *ground* or *reason* even of this *actual* existence; much less *that* of *necessary* existence. There is then a great difference between perceiving that God must *necessarily exist*, *a posteriori*; and that *necessity* is the *ground* of his existence, *a priori*. One *necessity* is as evidently concluded from any *finite* and *temporary* effect, to a *finite* and *temporary* cause; every *effect* necessarily inferring its *cause*: the other *necessity* relates only to *truth* and to *fact* only as one *infinite* effect. The *cause* here cannot be discovered from the *effect*; for

for the *necessary* and *infinite* effect is, to us, altogether *incomprehensible*: but the effect is to be argued from the *cause a priori*; and as concerning *existence*, is one *necessary* effect, one *necessary* Being every way *perfect* and *infinite*; the nature of whose existence therefore can only be known and argued *a priori*. Thus much, with what I have said before in the course of this argument, is, I hope, sufficient to obviate this mistake.

IT has been farther objected, that it is absurd to suppose a *cause prior* to the *first cause*; or that *necessity*, which is only a *mode* of *existence*, can be the *ground* of *existence*.

THIS objection, so far as it is a mere mistake, is very easily answered; I shall give it all the weight *that* I can perceive it really has. It is well known that the word *cause* may be used to signify a *necessary*, *natural*, or *voluntary* cause. All *voluntary* causes are strictly and properly *authors* of the effects produced. In this sense God is the *cause* or *author* of all Beings. A *natural cause* generally means some power in the constitution of nature, considered as *constantly* producing its effect in the course of *nature* (as it is call'd): but truly and really, both *cause* and *effect* are the mere production of the *will* of God, who is strictly the *cause* and *author* of every *natural power* and *effect*. The course of nature is therefore no otherwise *invariable* and *constant*, than as he sees fit to continue things in the *same state* and *circumstance*; and when we

we say any *power* or *effect* is out of, or beyond, the course of nature, if we examine our ideas, and think soberly, we shall find that these are *equally* the productions of his *will alone*, who ruleth over all ; and differ from what we call the *course* of nature, only as more *unusual* instances of the *same* cause or author, not in themselves more *difficult*, but more *uncommon* only. *Natural* and *voluntary* causes then differ only *thus* : they are both truly *voluntary* causes ; but God alone is to be consider'd as the *author* of all *natural* effects. He himself, or some other agent under his direction or permission, is the *author* of all *natural* effects. When we speak of a *voluntary* cause, that Being or agent is the *author*, whose *will* produces the effect ; and *so far* only as his *will* has *effect*. And here arises the great controversy among philosophers concerning the proper *effects* of the *wills* of all inferior agents : whether *their* *wills* ever produce *any* effects in nature ; or whether all *natural* effects are not the *proper actions* of God only. But the solution of this is of little importance in itself ; forasmuch as all agents *design* the *effects* of their actions, and all *moral* agents are therefore *accountable* for all their *actions* and *designs* ; and it is no part of our present subject. All *voluntary* causes are authors only of the proper *effects* of their *wills* and *actions*, in a *physical* sense.

NECESSARY causes cannot possibly be consider'd at all as *authors* of their *effects* :

will has here no place, and therefore they are very improperly said to *act* at all. *Necessary* causes produce by *necessity* their *necessary* effects. They admit of no *limitation*. Their effects are necessarily *infinite* in all space and duration. Therefore the *cause* cannot be *prior* to the *effect*, but in *order* of nature or conception. Nevertheless *necessity* is, in its own nature, a *cause*; and all *truth* and *necessary existence* are in *their* natures *effects* of necessity. There must be a *cause*, *reason*, and *foundation* of all *truth* and all *existence*; otherwise *true* proportions and relations may be as well *false*; and all *Beings* and *existences* may as well *not be* or *not exist*. Contingent *existence* may indeed, by its nature, *not exist*; but if it does exist, some *cause*, even a *voluntary* author of it, must also *exist*. In like manner *necessary existence* must have some sufficient *cause* of its *existence*, even *necessity*. A *Being* or *existence* *prior* to a *necessary Being*, or *first cause*, is indeed absurd: nevertheless there must be a *cause*, *reason*, or *foundation* why this *necessary Being* does exist; and that can only be *necessity*. The *cause* is not *prior* to the *effect*, as I said before, only in *order* of nature and conception; as all *truth* is founded on *necessity*, altho' nothing can possibly be *prior* to *necessary truth*. Here is the *mistake*, or rather *fallacy*. *Cause*, when applied to *truth*, or *necessary existence*, means only *reason*, *ground*, or *foundation*: when applied to *contingent effects*, it means some *Being*,

Being, substance, or existence consider'd as a voluntary author, who, as such, is the ground, and reason, and foundation of these contingent effects. These two ideas then being distinct and different, tho' express'd by the same word, a fallacy is introduced by using the same word in the same sentence, as if the ideas were also the same ; whereas they are manifestly changed, to make the proposition intelligible. Thus it is absurd to assert a cause prior to the first cause, meaning by cause, in both parts of the sentence, some Being, who is a voluntary cause ; for this is to assert some Being to exist before the first : but if cause, in the first part of the sentence, is allow'd to mean reason, ground, or foundation in general ; and in the latter part, to mean Being, author, and voluntary efficient ; all the absurdity ceases, and it is really no more than to assert that there is a reason, ground, or foundation, even necessity, for the existence of that mighty Being who is the first cause and author of all other Being and existence. This now seems plain to the meanest capacity, and has, I think, been evidently made out to be the very truth. Learned and artful men may throw a dust of opposition upon the clearest argument, if others will hearken to authority, and gaze at and admire what they do not understand : but I am persuaded, that the most unlearned and lowest capacity would be safe from delusion, if they would not endeavour and pretend to solve difficulties

that they really do not *perceive*; but would judge and determine only so far as their reason and capacity did truly reach. Some deep and abstract truths might *thus* indeed escape many of our narrow minds; but so also would the difficulties and objections that attend them: and I doubt not truths of all sorts would *first* appear to every degree of our understandings, rather than those errors and delusions which are introduced by attention to learned and subtil disputation upon points unexamined and unsettled by our *common sense* and *rational judgment*.

As to *necessity's* being rather a *mode* than a *foundation* of existence; one that is sincerely in search of truth will not stay to dispute merely about *words*. If by *mode* be meant every *circumstance* of existence, to be sure the *cause*, *reason*, or *author* of existence will be included: and so will even the *ends* and *designs* of existence. But this is, I think, an unusual *extension* of the idea. *Thus* the *will* of God, upon which all *contingent existence* does depend, is a *mode* of the existence of *contingent Being*: and thus *happiness* or *misery*, for which every created, moral, and sensible Being is *designed* by its nature, is a *mode* of the existence of such a Being. This seems too loose and indeterminate a way of reasoning; and, I verily think, serves rather to *obscure* this argument *a priori*, than to *illustrate* truth. It is very plain, that *necessity* is not a *mode* of God's existence in the same sense

sense as *eternity*, *infinity*, and the like are. Such modes are subsequent to the consideration of the existence of any Being ; altho' they subsist equally, in point of time, with the Being to whom they belong ; and so does the *cause* or *author* of every existence, consider'd as *operating* or *producing* the effect, whether the *cause* be *necessarily* or not. There is only this difference ; a *voluntary* cause or *author* may be consider'd *distinct* from its production, and *without* it : a *necessary* cause can-not ; for it must *necessarily* produce its effect, or *not at all*. Nevertheless the *co-existence* of the *cause* and *effect*, or the *joint-consideration* of them, whether *necessarily* or *voluntarily* operating, does by no means confound the one with the other. The *will* of God is still the *cause*, whatever other name may be given it, of the *contingent* existence ; and *necessity* is the *cause* of God's *necessary* existence.

ETERNITY and *infinity* are *modes only*, and do not imply or infer *necessity* of existence ; but *necessity* is a *ground* or *foundation* of existence, and must imply therefore every *necessary mode*, as *eternity*, *infinity*, &c. All existence that is the *effect* of *necessity* must have invariably all *necessary modes* ; whereas *contingent* existence may have what modes the author of its Being sees fit to confer ; therefore *contingent modes* may be *subsequent* to the *contingent* existence ; or *contingent* ex-istence may be partially consider'd : not so in *necessary* existence ; the *modes* of such ex-istence

istence must also be *necessary*, and cannot possibly be *subsequent*: *necessity* is the *cause* and *foundation* of the existence of the *substance*, and all its *modes* and *properties*. *Necessity* is not a *mode*, but the *foundation* of all *truth*. I do not indeed see how *mode* can be predicated of *ideal* truth, altho' *necessity* always is, not as a *property*, but as a *foundation* of *truth*. *Mode* relates to *Being*, *substance*, and *existence*: *contingent* modes to *contingent* Beings; and *necessary* modes to *necessary* Being. If *ideal* truth was capable of *modes*, those *modes* must be *necessary*, as all *truth* is; and therefore all the *proportions* and *relations* of *truth* to other *truths* or Beings are also *necessary*. So also are the *proportions* and *relations* of *contingent* Beings, with respect to one another, *necessary*; not consider'd as the *properties* of those Beings (in this sense they must be *contingent*); but consider'd as *truths* arising *necessarily* from their *actual* existence.

THERE is, and can possibly be, but *one necessary* truth of *existence*, as has been shewn; the *modes* and *properties* of which must be therefore *necessary*: but *necessity* can with no propriety be said to be a *mode* of *necessary* Being; altho' *necessary* Being supposes *necessity* as its *cause* or *foundation*; even as *necessary* truth implies *necessity* as its *cause*. It has not been usual to consider the *existence* of God as *necessary fact* or *truth*: therefore *necessity* has either not been asserted at all concerning God's *existence*, or it has meant only a *nec-*
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sity *a posteriori*, to account for the phænomena of *nature*, or to reconcile our reasonings with facts, that is, *hypothetical necessity*; or if it has been admitted by force of reason, it has been insisted on as a *mode* or *property*, or any thing besides the *cause* or *foundation* of God's existence; insomuch that *perfection* has been said to be equally a *foundation* of existence; and that *necessity* was no more connected with existence in God, than a *square* with a *circle*. This is very strange, if one did not see, in other cases, to what degrees of absurdity, force of opposition will carry men. What is *perfection*, but an *aggregate* of *modes* and *properties*, which suppose some *Being* to which they belong? and therefore cannot possibly be the *cause* or *foundation* of its existence: but that *cause*, whatever it be, must be the *foundation* of the *Being* and all its *perfections*: whereas *necessity* does not, as a *property*, depend upon the *substance* or *Being*, but is itself the *ground* and *support* of the *substance* and all its *properties*: so that if it must be call'd a *mode* or *property* of God, it is quite *unlike* all *other modes* and *properties*, and must be *so* in a very peculiar sense, and *sui generis*. *Necessity* is allow'd to be *naturally* and *necessarily* connected with all *truth*; but not with *existence*, any more than *circle* with *square*. This gross mistake arises from want of considering *necessary existence* as *truth* or *necessary fact*: and no wonder, when God's *existence* is only allow'd or asserted in consequence

quence of the existence of other Beings, and to save absurdities in our reasonings ; and it is even insisted on, that the author of all things exists without any *cause* or *reason*, and only *exists* because he *exists*. If this be true, *necessity* has indeed no connection with *existence* ; for with *contingent* existence it can have *none*, but is inconsistent with it ; and *that Being* who is the *cause* of all *contingent* existence, is so far, it seems, from having *necessity* for the foundation of *his* existence, that *he* exists without *any cause* or *reason* at all. But if there is a *reason* and *cause* why all things and Beings are what they are, there must be surely a *reason* why the *cause* and *author* of all things does *exist* ; and that can be no other than the *reason* of all *truth*, even *necessity* ; and then *necessity* is as clearly connected (not indeed with all *existence* in general, but) with *God's* *existence*, as it is with *other truth*.

IT is said, that *truth* can only be follow'd to some *self-evident* *truth* ; and *existence* or *fact* to some *first* *cause* or *fact*. But this is a great *mistake*. The *ground* of all *truth* is *necessity*, whether perceived *intuitively* or by *deduction*. The *top* of *truth*, as it is weakly call'd (for all *truths* are equally *first*) is *necessity* of proportion or relation : so likewise the *ground* of the *existence* of the *author* of all things is *necessity* ; and the *top* (or *foundation* more properly) of *fact* is, not the *first* *cause* and *author*, (for the *existence* of *God* is also *fact*, tho' *necessary fact*) but *necessity* of *existence*

ence is the *top* (if that word must be used) of all *fact*.

In short, the great difference between the opposers and asserters of this argument *a priori* is this: As it relates to *ideal* truth, they say, that there is really no *reason* for, or *ground* of truth; but true relations and proportions are so, without any *ground* or *reason*: we say, that *necessity* is the *ground* and *foundation* of all *truth*, *proportions*, and *relations*. Again, as it relates to *existence*, they say, there is no *cause* or *reason* of God's *existence*, but he does exist without any *ground* or *foundation*: we say, *necessity* is the *reason* of God's *existence*, which is not only a *fact* that cannot be denied, but *necessary fact* or *truth*. At this important point we part, and each of us must look to the necessary consequence of these different ways and opinions; and I have endeavoured to make them appear in the course of this argument.

If after all it should be said, that altho' this reasoning is strictly and metaphysically true, and the argument *a priori* is the only *medium* of proving the *necessary* nature and *infinite* perfections of God; yet is it of little use and importance in general, being apprehended but by a *few*, and not level to common capacities; whereas the Being and perfections of God are the foundation of all religion, and ought therefore to be clear and evident to *all*, upon plain principles of truth; and more particularly, that the *unity* of God

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has ever been reckon'd a *first* principle of true religion ; and men in *general* have been justly condemned for not seeing it, and worshiping God accordingly ; altho' by this reasoning, the *unity* appears only to be proved by the argument *a priori*, in a way above common capacities, who are nevertheless equally required to know and acknowledge this great truth, of the *unity* of God.

To all this I answer ; First, that the argument is unfairly represented, as more *obscure* and *difficult* than it really is, and has been yet *farther* and *unnaturally* involved by shews of learning and zeal of disputation ; whereas it requires little more than freedom from prejudices, and a very ordinary understanding, to comprehend the obvious force of this reasoning, without *affected* and *metaphysical* terms : not more than is requisite to be convinced justly by the more *usual* argument *a posteriori*. What can be more plain and obvious, than that all things are the *product* of some mighty Being, who himself could not be produced by any *other*, altho' there must also be a *reason* why this *first* Being does exist, otherwise he may as well *not exist* : and as there can be only two foundations of Being, the *will* of some author, or *necessity*, (for chance and accident, &c. are only words signifying our ignorance of the real cause) the latter only remains to be the *reason* of God's existence,

THEN as to notions of the divine *perfections* ;

tions ; unless they are to be taken for granted, without any inquiry into their *nature* and *foundation*, as is indeed the common case ; there is no other medium of conceiving them *absolutely* and *properly* : and therefore whether men discover these perfections regularly and artificially, or no, I must think that they can no otherways get the *true ideas* of *absolute perfections*, than by considering them as belonging to *necessary Being*. Proper and *absolute* eternity, infinity, and the like, cannot, as I have shewn, be gather'd from any arguments *a posteriori* ; and therefore must be taken for granted, and not proved at all ; or be demonstrated from the nature of *necessity* as a *cause* or *foundation*. The *unity* of God in particular is no other way to be demonstrated : and I am persuaded that this is the manner in which the most ordinary understandings conceive it ; tho' perhaps they may not attend to the due *steps* and *method* of their reasoning. I would always exclude, from any pretences of *difficulty*, such as make *no inquiry* at all, and are content with being *told* what they afterwards take for *truth*, without examination.

THOSE then who reason at all about the unity of God, consider this universe, and all created things, as the product of *one Almighty Agent*, who possesses *infinite perfections*, and is altogether *independent* : they perceive but *one perfect Being necessary* for all these *effects* ; and can never, by *reason alone*, be led to

more than *one first cause*, however *possible* more may appear to them before due consideration. Many uncertainties and dangerous conclusions will offer, upon supposition of *more than one*: the errors may be *infinite*, and their *homage* and *dependence* will be quite *confounded* and *undirected*: there will hardly be any *remedy*, but to inquire after *all* religious pretences, and to worship every *imaginary* and even *unknown God*. Hence will spring up all possible *superstition* and *idolatry*; and every *absurdity* will be embraced, for fear of missing the *truth*; and *religion* will really have no *foundation* at all, while the *object* of worship and obedience is altogether *unknown*. If therefore men will have any *religion* at all, there is no possible rational *support* of their dependence, but the *unity* of God, which they *must* embrace and maintain, whether they consider the *ground* and *foundation* of it as *truth*, or no; otherwise they can never have any *united* hopes or *consistent* principles of *religion*.

HENCE good and virtuous men have never given up this *necessary* article of all true religion, the *unity* of God, however ill they have proved or defended it; because they have always seen, that, without it, no *ground* of faith and dependence could be held, and *idolatry* and *superstition* *must* prevail without remedy. Hence also the *justest* condemnation has been passed upon all *false* and *perverted* notions of the Deity, as proceeding from

from vicious and corrupt minds, who did not like to retain the knowledge of the one God of the universe, and are therefore given over to all unrighteousness, as the due recompence of their error; and have no refuge but in all manner of superstitions and idolatries, which alone can flatter their deluded hopes and vain imaginations: while the notion of one only supreme and perfect Deity is a security only for virtue and uprightness.

HEREIN lies the just immorality of idolatry and superstition: not in mere mistaken notions of the Deity; these may be innocent and unavoidable: but in such errors and absurdities as vice and corruption lead to, and make, as it were, necessary. He that believes in and obeys one only supreme God, the author of the universe, and the most perfect and excellent moral agent, who necessarily perceives all truth, and constantly judges and acts conformably to it, according to infinite wisdom, justice, and goodness; can have no rule of action but reason and truth, or the will of this mighty and excellent Being, in perfect consistence with reason and truth; and no refuge for happiness but in his favour, only to be obtain'd by the practice of integrity. On the contrary, he that doubts of this unity, and is ready to receive vain, uncertain and superstitious notions of the Deity, has a like uncertain rule of conduct, and false dependence; and is therefore ready, in proportion to his vice and corruption, to change the

the truth of God into a lie, and to embrace these false and idolatrous objects of trust, as the only possible, tho' merely imaginary, refuge of unrighteousness. This is true then in the *nature* of things, and follows from the constant dispositions of *virtue* and *vice* in *rational dependent Beings*; altho' there were no arguments further to prove the *unity* of **God**: and this is enough to justify the condemnation of those who, thro' *immorality*, deny the *unity*. If therefore there were no *other* reasons to support the *unity* of **God**, the *vice* and *corruption* that raises the contrary doubts and principles, and *constantly* and *naturally* attends the denial of it, is *sufficient* to lead virtuous and good men to this *great truth*; which, upon that supposition, *wants indeed* evidence to support it: and so the interests of *virtue* and *true religion* are extremely defec-tive in point of *reason* and *argument*; and men are *falsely* directed to this *great principle* as *truth*, which has really no *ground* and *founda-tion*. Nevertheless this principle of the *unity* of **God** is, we see, *necessary* to the *support* of *virtue* and *true religion*. If there may be *more* than *one God*, all is *uncertain* and *hopeless*; if *one only*, all is *safe* and *secure*, whatever evi-dence there *is or is not* of this *great truth*.

BUT the evidence of the *unity* is as plain and obvious as *that* of the *existence*. Every man that believes in *one author* and *cause* of all things, as a supreme and perfect moral intelligence; altho' he may not be immedi-ately

ately able to deny, or at least to convince the asserters of, *more original authors* and *causes*, has however no reason to believe and trust in *more*: for it is plain, that *one* is sufficient to answer all *phænomena* and *dependence*; and *one* such mighty *cause* and *author* is evidently *necessary*, in this sense. But this is not the sense of *necessity* as a *foundation* or *cause* of *existence*; and how shall he be led to the *unity*? I have already shewn, that very ordinary and common capacities may perceive the whole force of the argument from *necessity* as the *ground* and *reason* of God's *existence*: the next step then, to the *unity*, is very plain and strong. *Necessity* cannot be the *foundation* of *two* such *necessary* Beings: the *effects*, if *more* than *one*, would be in *every* respect *alike* and the *same*, there being no possible *will* or *limitation* concerned: so that what is call'd *two*, could only be in effect *one* and the *same*: even as *necessity* in respect of *every truth*, is the *cause* of *one only truth* of *every kind*; so also is it the *cause* of *one only necessary existence*. From any other *cause* of *existence*, except only *necessity*, *infinite* kinds and degrees of *Being* may proceed; because the *effects* of this *cause*, which is the *will* of a *perfect* agent, may be *infinitely* diversified; and yet, even in this case, it is quite absurd to imagine the *voluntary* production of *two same Beings*; but from *necessity* as a *cause*, *one only* can proceed; *one only* in *kind*, *degree*, and *perfection*. This then is the plain and obvious

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argument for the *unity* of God, which might be farther enlarged upon; but more has been said before, which, with this, seems abundantly sufficient.

THIS is all I have at present to offer concerning this great and important argument for the *existence* and *perfections* of God. I have insisted upon nothing but what I take to be the *truth*; I have wilfully concealed no force of *any* objection against it; I have faithfully endeavour'd to collect the *strength* of all I could meet with, in opposition to this reasoning; nay, I have myself honestly set forth any difficulty that I could *frame*, that seem'd to have any weight. Upon the whole, if the argument does not appear to be sufficiently *clear* and *evident* in proportion to its *pretensions* and *importance*, I hope I may be excused presuming it to be stronger than it is with no ill design; and shall not, however, lose a considerable part of my intention, which was, to give *myself* some satisfaction upon this head, by putting the reasoning into some order of judgment, free from the *violences* of prejudice and *perverse* opposition. If I shall have in any measure succeeded in assisting others to examine and understand this great and important truth; and especially if they may hereby be induced to hold fast the *principles* and *practice* of *virtue* and *true religion*; I shall have the utmost of my wishes.

